

# Quality Review Report 2009-2010

**University Neighborhood Middle School**

**Middle School 332**

**220 Henry Street  
New York  
NY 10004**

**Principal: Laura Peynado Castro**

**Dates of review: May 13 – 14, 2010**

**Lead Reviewer: Michael Schurek**

## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

University Neighborhood Middle School is a school with 178 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 24% Black, 70% Hispanic, 5% Asian and 1% other students. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 13% special education students. Boys account for 51% of the students enrolled and girls account for 49%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2008 - 2009 was 89.6%.

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

University Neighborhood Middle School derives its name from its mission to ensure that its students are prepared for the rigors of higher education and sets high expectations for all stakeholders, including English language learners and students in need of additional support. Students describe their study as challenging and praise teachers for their willingness to provide extra help before, during and after school and through email support when not in school. Numerous partnerships provide extensive social-emotional support to students and their families, and promote technological and instructional advancements that enable the entire school community to move forward.

Administrators and teachers utilize the Wiki and googledocs spreadsheets to share copious amounts of data that are used to determine student needs and adjust instruction and organization accordingly. However, the school does not set measurable interim benchmarks as part of their monitoring process to ensure timely revision and celebrate the success of their work. Rubrics are evident in all subjects, but are not consistently used to communicate next learning steps to students to improve the quality of their work. The school uses its conferencing protocol to establish English language arts goals for every student during Book Club and Humanities classes. However, this practice has not yet been expanded to other subjects to ensure that students in need of intervention have established differentiated learning goals across all content areas that can be tracked over time to promote accountability and ensure improvement in student learning.

Almost all teachers participate in content area teams that meet three times each week to conduct high levels of inquiry and develop effective strategies that improve student outcomes, thereby empowering teachers to analyze student work, brainstorm ideas and adjust instructional practices. Teachers also meet in professional development support teams based on their stage of teaching development three times each month to reflect on their professional progress and develop their next learning steps. Team leaders receive on-going training for these roles enabling them to conduct highly structured collaborations that successfully build capacity while improving their leadership skills.

Parents are pleased with the school's safe, nurturing environment and are especially impressed with the rigorous amount of reading their children have accomplished through new school endeavors such as the Book Club. The school community stands united behind the principal as they share her vision, working with her as a team to make a difference for the children. They are determined to overcome any challenges by working together with consistency, respect, empathy and shared responsibility to achieve school-wide goals.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- Leaders make informed and effective organizational decisions across all aspects of the school to support improvements in learning.
  - The principal uses school resources, including grants, to lower class size and retain the services of a full-time teacher mentor and part-time coaches. In addition, these resources are used to expand the book club program to support the school's goals of increased student achievement, resulting in reading level gains of two years for students so far this year.
  - Teacher time has been modified to markedly increase the number of times teams meet to collaborate, share best practices, support each other and conduct inquiry to improve instruction and achieve school goals, thereby motivating teachers to develop strategies that increase learning.
- Administrators and teachers meticulously use a wide range of assessment data to monitor school level needs, student progress, plan instruction and create intervention or extension strategies when needed.
  - In addition to accessing historical scholarship data, the school created and maintains a Wiki to organize data and display unit plans in all subjects to foster organized lesson planning. Teachers also share googledocs data with each other so that they are able to identify trends and compare student performance in all subjects.
  - The administration and teachers separate data by subgroups to make school level decisions collectively that meet student needs. Current data reveals a trend identifying male students as lower level readers. As a result of this discovery, teachers and students submit book titles with accompanying reviews to be considered for use in the school's Book Club program to ensure that all students' interests are accommodated to motivate students to read and achieve school wide goals.
- The principal is creating a learning environment that is well focused on student outcomes with a vision to accelerate learning.
  - The school's vision is exemplified in their motto, "Together we make the difference". The overall mission of developing a collaborative culture of learning connects to school-wide student achievement goals for students in reading, writing and mathematics. The school's action plans are considered living documents and adjustments are made as needed. For instance, weak Acuity results prompted the school to align Project Arts activities with science and humanities curriculums by developing project-based interdisciplinary activities that increase student writing during art classes to improve student outcomes.
  - All stakeholders are involved in an annual planning process. Department teacher teams, a student team and the school leadership team determine needs and collectively design action plans like this year's decision to utilize student writing portfolios, resulting in strong community support.

- All teachers welcome the frequent opportunities to participate in collaborative inquiry and use this common planning time to strengthen instruction and raise learning outcomes.
  - All teachers meet three times each week in content area teams that utilize protocols to conduct collaborative inquiry work, resulting in an increase of differentiated instruction and shared practice across the entire school. For instance, a conferencing strategy originated by the humanities team is now used by all teachers during Book Club, and is being adopted by the mathematics and science teams.
  - Teacher team leaders meet regularly with the principal as part of an instructional support group and have been trained through New York University to conduct collaborative inquiry. School leaders encourage teachers to try new instructional ideas, resulting in highly creative team brainstorming. A second year teacher referred to the high level of team engagement during team meetings when he commented about his initial participation, "I felt like I was sitting in the middle of astronauts."
- Highly effective student support services and partnerships provide students with a wide range of opportunities to grow academically and socially.
  - The school enjoys numerous partnerships with community based organizations that provide child/youth services through on-site counseling to students and conduct parenting workshops to families in need.
  - Guidance counselors and sapis personnel provide workshops that enable staff to utilize behavior modification techniques, and students to create suicide prevention skits that support social-emotional learning.
- The school provides extensive individualized professional development and support for teachers to learn effective teaching methods and encourages them to self-evaluate and revise their instructional approaches when suitable.
  - Faculty meetings occur three times each month where teachers are grouped according to their experience and stage of teaching development based on the California Teaching Standards to ensure consistency and coherence. This practice enables the school to provide differentiated support for its staff in alignment with the school's instructional beliefs.
  - Learning opportunities occur at least three times each week during content area professional learning periods and reflect facilitative methods, such as the use of protocols and the study of student and teacher work, to guide instructional improvements. Teachers visit colleagues' classrooms to share best practices that accelerate student outcomes.

### **What the school needs to improve**

- Strengthen teachers' responses to student work, to include guiding comments and level of performance based on rubrics and related exemplars, to convey clear next steps for improvement to the students and their families.
  - The school has recently decided to practice portfolio assessment; however, rubrics and genre exemplars are inconsistently utilized to rate student projects and suggest next steps to improve the quality of

submitted student products. It is not an established practice for students to use rubrics to reflect and self-assess the quality of their work.

- Staff members are personally responsible for contacting five parents each as part of the school's Adopt-a-Parent initiative and mid-period progress reports are sent home, however, specific next learning steps are inconsistently communicated through these venues.
- Refine action planning by linking all interim goals to targeted benchmarks at specific intervals so that all plans can be monitored to expedite revisions, maximize impact and celebrate successes along the way.
  - School action plans use percentage-based targets as the annual goal in selected areas, such as students achieving one year's progress in English Language Arts and Mathematics State examinations, students advancing one reading level as measured by the Qualitative Reading Inventory, and teachers regularly engaged in collaborative inquiry. Benchmarks measuring progress towards these goals at specific intervals during the school year are not indicated. The lack of these structures hampers the school's ability to determine the effectiveness of their actions along the way to allow for contingencies and make timely adjustments that improve outcomes. It also limits the school's ability to align planning from one year to the next.
- Extend the practice of setting differentiated learning goals for student subgroups and students in need of additional support to all subjects to accelerate student learning.
  - The school's Book Club hosts groups of ten to fifteen students grouped homogeneously by gender and reading level and places special education students and English language learners into these groups based on their abilities and needs. Teachers use the conferencing protocol to identify areas of need for each student to establish differentiated learning goals so that all students can fulfill their potential. However, the school does not establish differentiated learning goals for student subgroups in all subjects, thereby missing opportunities to ensure their success by making adjustments to classroom and intervention practices.
- Ensure that all goals include short- and long-term measurable outcomes to monitor students' progress effectively, and to reinforce ownership and accountability for teachers and students to maximize outcomes.
  - Teacher teams and individual teachers use googledocs spreadsheets to monitor and identify subject skills for each unit of study, but have not yet developed systems to track cumulative student progress that can be used to promote accountability for all stakeholders and provide feedback to students and families.

## Part 3: School Quality Criteria 2009-2010

<b>School name: University Neighborhood Middle School</b>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>▶</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
<b>Overall QR Score</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 1 – Instructional and Organizational Coherence: The school has a coherent strategy to support student learning that aligns curriculum, instruction and organizational decisions.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school regularly...</i>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>▶</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
1.1 Design engaging, rigorous and coherent curricula, including the Arts, for a variety of learners and aligned to key State standards?			<b>X</b>	
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best, and ensure that it is: aligned to the curriculum, engaging, and differentiated to enable all students to produce meaningful work products?			<b>X</b>	
1.3 Make strategic organizational decisions to support the school's instructional goals and meet student learning needs?				<b>X</b>
1.4 Maintain a culture of mutual trust and positive attitudes toward learning that support the academic and personal growth of students and adults?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>			<b>X</b>	
<b>Quality Statement 2 – Gather and Analyze Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather, analyze and share information on student learning outcomes to understand school and student progress over time.</b>				
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	<b>Δ</b>	<b>▶</b>	<b>✓</b>	<b>+</b>
2.1 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the school level?			<b>X</b>	
2.2 Gather and analyze information on student learning outcomes to identify trends, strengths, and areas of need at the team and classroom level?			<b>X</b>	
2.3 Use or develop tools to enable school leaders and teachers to organize and analyze student performance trends?			<b>X</b>	
2.4 Engage in an open exchange of information with students and families regarding students' learning needs and outcomes?			<b>X</b>	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			<b>X</b>	

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently engage the school community and use data to set and track suitably high goals for accelerating student learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school ...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
3.1 Establish a coherent vision of future development that is reflected in a short list of focused, data-based goals that are understood and supported by the entire school community?				X			
3.2 Use collaborative and data informed processes to set measurable and differentiated learning goals for student subgroups, and students in need of additional support?			X				
3.3 Ensure the achievement of learning goals by tracking progress at the school, teacher team and classroom level?		X					
3.4 Communicate high expectations to students and families, engage them in decision-making, and promote active involvement in the school community?			X				
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X			
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building: The school aligns its leadership development and structured professional collaboration around meeting the school’s goals and student learning and emotional needs.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
4.1 Use the observation of classroom teaching and the analysis of learning outcomes to elevate school-wide instructional practices and implement strategies that promote professional growth and reflection, with a special focus on new teachers?				X			
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning?				X			
4.3 Provide professional development that promotes independent and shared reflection, opportunities for leadership growth, and enables teachers to continuously evaluate and revise their classroom practices to improve learning outcomes?				X			
4.4 Integrate child/youth development, support services and partnerships with families and outside organizations with the school-wide goals to accelerate the academic and personal growth of students?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>				X			
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for monitoring and evaluating progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>							
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	△	➤	✓	+			
5.1 Evaluate the quality of curricular, instructional and organizational decisions, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.2 Evaluate systems for assessing students, organizing data, and sharing information with student and families, making adjustments as needed to increase the coherence of policies and practices across the school?			X				
5.3 Establish and sustain a transparent, collaborative system for measuring progress towards interim and long term goals and making adjustments during the year and over time?			X				
5.4 Use data to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of structured professional collaboration, capacity building and leadership development strategies?				X			
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>				X			
<b>Quality Review Scoring Key</b>							
△	<b>Underdeveloped</b>	➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>	✓	<b>Proficient</b>	+	<b>Well Developed</b>